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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-first year

Identical letters dated 30 March 2016 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

We write today to reiterate our strong condemnation of the campaign of murder and aggression of Israel, the occupying Power, in particular its continued practice of extrajudicial killings against Palestinian civilians, particularly youth, held captive under its brutal occupation in the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem. While Israel's illegal policy of extrajudicial killings, most carried out execution-style, have been incessant throughout its nearly five-decade-long occupation, this illegal practice has been on the rise since October 2015, when the occupying Power stepped up its aggression against the Palestinian people. Such unlawful attacks, which amount to war crimes and indicate an abject disdain for the worth of Palestinian lives, have further ignited an already extremely tense situation on the ground.

In this connection, we wish to add to the record of Israeli war crimes the gruesome killing of two young Palestinians, Ramzi Qasrawi and Abdul Fattah al-Sharif, both age 21, who were killed in the Tal Rumeida neighbourhood in Al-Khalil by Israeli occupying forces on the morning of 24 March 2016. A video captured by a field worker from the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem shows two bodies lying on the ground after being shot. The video shows the body of Abdul Fattah lying on the ground after being shot as occupying forces and medical teams walk around his body, providing no medical assistance, while Palestinian ambulances were blocked from reaching the area. Minutes later, the video shows a well-known terrorist settler asking an Israeli soldier, who is also a so-called medic, if "the dog is dead" and, if he is not dead, to "shoot him in the head". The Israeli soldier obliges and shoots him in the head at point-blank range.

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The video clearly shows that Abdul Fattah was disarmed and not posing a threat to anyone, proving that the occupying Power has carried out yet another extrajudicial execution. Abhorrently, a third video shows the Israeli soldier who shot Abdul Fattah in the head shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries with another well-known extreme illegal settler from Al-Khalil as if nothing happened. This only further displays the level of moral corruption that exists throughout the ranks of the Israeli occupying forces as well as the entrenched and utter disdain for Palestinian life.

We recall the recent remarks by the Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International, who stated in a recent press release that "the shooting of a wounded and incapacitated person, even if they have been involved in an attack, has absolutely no justification and must be prosecuted as a potential war crime". He went on to state, "Israeli forces have a long history of carrying out unlawful killings — including extrajudicial executions — in the Occupied Palestinian Territories with impunity." It is in this connection and following the recently released video footage providing evidence of Israeli war crimes that the Palestinian leadership has formally requested that the United Nations initiate an official investigation into Israeli extrajudicial killings of Palestinian civilians. The request calls for the investigation not only of the execution of Abdul Fattah but of all other extrajudicial killings carried out by the Israeli occupying forces since the beginning of this most recent aggression since October 2015.

At the same time, we must highlight that after the heinous act of the extrajudicial execution of Abdul Fattah, Israeli government officials have been vulgarly vying with each other as to who is more in support of the Israeli soldier that committed this latest war crime, with some officials even calling him a hero in a clear example of official encouragement and effective impunity. Such clear examples of incitement are exactly what allow Israeli occupying forces and illegal settlers alike to commit crimes against Palestinians, including women and children, without fear of punishment. This has undoubtedly fostered a culture of impunity that prevails throughout the ranks of occupying forces and the settler population.

Moreover, evidence of how incitement by government officials itself leads to inflaming hate and racism among the Israeli public is reflected in the fact that shortly after the video of the extrajudicial execution surfaced on the Internet, polls conducted showed that more than half of Israelis support the Israeli soldier that carried out the execution. Furthermore, the Israeli soldier that carried this murder out has attracted widespread support on Israeli social media, with thousands of Israelis joining Facebook support groups and another 50,000 signing a petition backing his actions.

Having stated the above, we recognize the condemnation made by many in the international community of Israel's latest extrajudicial killing in grave violation of international law, including international humanitarian law. However, the international community must go further and compel an end to this cruel and illegal practice by the occupying Power. It is tragic, yet true, that if video footage had not been taken of this latest Israeli crime, it would have been ignored, just as the hundreds of other killings of Palestinians by the occupying Power have gone ignored and unpunished and with most of these killings attributed to so-called "thwarting attackers". The facts on the ground are shockingly clear and must not be distorted — the Palestinian civilian population is a defenceless population facing

the constant aggression of the occupying Power in the most violent and innumerable ways and they are in need of, and entitled to, protection in accordance with international humanitarian law, namely the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Palestinian leadership thus again appeals to the international community, particularly the Security Council, to uphold its obligations in this regard and to undertake measures for the protection of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation. These are not random incidents of human rights violations and war crimes by the Israeli occupying forces, but rather part of a systematic, intentional pattern of behaviour targeting and demeaning Palestinian lives. Justice must be served and the Palestinian people must be protected in order to avert more death, destruction and suffering being inflicted by Israel, the occupying Power, as it continues to trample and gravely breach international law. The international community cannot continue to rationalize, excuse or cover up Israel's crimes. The Security Council, which is tasked with the duty to maintain international peace and security and has taken upon itself commitments for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, must act forthwith to end Israeli impunity and be on the right side of history.

Before concluding, I must also draw attention to some of the other crimes perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, in the period since our last letter to you:

23 March 2016

- Israeli occupying forces detained overnight eight Palestinians from across the West Bank.
- Occupying forces demolished and removed Palestinian-owned residential structures in Khirbet Tana, a small village to the east of Nablus.
- Occupying forces closed the main entrances leading to the southern West Bank city of Al-Khalil and several neighbouring towns.
- Israeli settlers resumed provocative tours into Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Occupied East Jerusalem, inflaming tensions with Palestinian worshipers.

24 March 2016

- At least 23 Palestinians, including a young girl, were detained by Israeli occupying forces, mostly during predawn raids across the West Bank.
- Israeli occupying forces shot dead Ramzi Qasrawi (age 21) and extrajudicially executed Abdul Fattah al-Sharif (age 21) in Tal Rumeida neighbourhood in the centre of Al-Khalil.

25 March 2016

- Israeli occupying forces shot an elderly Palestinian man, Taysir Shtewei (age 68), in the head with a rubber-coated steel bullet and injured dozens of other civilians, including many who suffered excessive tear-gas inhalation, in the towns of Bilin and Kafr Qaddum.

26 March 2016

- Israeli occupying forces detained a Palestinian and summoned five others for interrogation from the West Bank districts of Tubas and Bethlehem.
- Occupying forces shot and injured four Palestinians near the border in the Gaza Strip.
- Occupying forces opened fire on Palestinian farmers and shepherds in the Gaza Strip, forcing them to leave their fields.

27 March 2016

- Israeli occupying forces detained 12 Palestinians from across the West Bank, including from Bethlehem, Tulkarem and Al-Khalil.
- Occupying forces shot at Palestinian farmers and shepherds to the east of Rafah in the Gaza Strip.

28 March 2016

- Israeli occupying forces detained seven Palestinians, including two children, during predawn raids across the West Bank.
- Persisting with illegal colonization measures, occupying forces demolished and destroyed a home, a farm, electric wires, a water network and trees and razed a tract of land at the northern entrance to Bethlehem.
- Occupying forces stormed the family homes of Ahmed Zakarneh, Mohammed Kamil and Najeh Abu al-Rub during a predawn raid in the town of Qabatiya, near Jenin, in order to demolish their homes in an act of collective punishment.
- Occupying forces issued and renewed administrative detention orders against 27 Palestinian detainees, keeping them captive in prison without a charge or trial. Ten of the detainees received administrative detention orders for the first time, whereas the remaining 17 received renewed administrative orders.

29 March 2016

- Israeli naval boats fired at Palestinian fishermen sailing offshore from Gaza, while occupying forces opened fire at farmers when they attempted to reach their lands.
- Israeli occupying forces detained 21 Palestinians, including a journalist, and assaulted another during several West Bank raids.
- Occupying forces demolished a children's playground, a wall and a stable and uprooted around 30 fruit trees in the East Jerusalem town of Silwan.

It is a regrettable fact that all such crimes by Israel, the occupying Power, and its occupying forces, whether its military forces or its settlers, will continue to be perpetrated against the Palestinian people if the international community continues to fail to hold Israel to account and to the same rules and norms of international law and human rights standards as the rest of the world. Israel is an occupying Power, and there are clear provisions of law and even clearer prohibitions that are being grossly, systematically and gravely violated by the occupying Power and its

occupying forces as a matter of policy and practice. Israel cannot continue to be exempt from the law, destroying innocent Palestinian lives, destroying the Palestinian land and fabric of our society and destroying the two-State solution and the prospects for peace. The international community must end its "management of this conflict" and seriously undertake measures to finally compel Israel to end its half-century occupation along with all of its other crimes against the Palestinian people and finally allow the Palestinian people to realize the freedom, rights and justice they have for too long been tragically denied.

This letter is in follow-up to our 580 previous letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 22 March 2016 (A/ES-10/716-S/2016/270), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators be brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of the
State of Palestine to the United Nations